

and recently in the possession of M. Boucard, was noted by the collector as having the iris dark grey.

Léotaud, in his article on this species, to which I have already referred, says, "Cire, iris et pattes d'un jaune clair; bec noir."

In Professor Sumichrast's notes on the 'Birds of South-Western Mexico,' published by Mr. Lawrence, he says of this species, at p. 42, "iris brown; upper mandible black, the lower, cere, lores, eyelids, and feet bluish ash, the cere spotted with black."

Professor Schlegel, in his article on this species, which I have already quoted, says, "Serres, iris de l'œil, angle de la bouche et moitié postérieure de la mandibule inférieure d'un jaune orange; freins et paupière supérieure d'un jaune clair."

Judging from the skins which I have examined, I believe that the base of the lower mandible is yellow in the young birds only, and not in the adult.

[To be continued.]

XXXI.—*Ornithological Letters from the Pacific*. No. III.*

By OTTO FINSCH, Ph.D., H.M.B.O.U., &c.

Taluit (Bonham), Marshall Islands,
November 15, 1879.

SINCE I wrote you my last letter (dated September 20th) I have made a trip in a small schooner of 80 tons to the eastern (Ratak) chain of this group of islands, without doing much as regards ornithology. Sea-birds were generally as rare as they were on the voyage down the Pacific from Honolulu. In fact, we passed days when not one single bird was seen, and Tropic-birds (*Phaeton flavirostris* and *P. athereus*) and a single species of Shearwater were almost the only ornithological appearances at all. The latter was dark brown all over; but the birds were always too far out to recognize the species. Once only I noticed a *Procellaria*, dark, with a white rump. Frigate-birds (*Tachypetes*) I only observed twice, high in the air, but easily recognizable by their forked

* For No. II, see 'Ibis,' 1880, p. 218.

tails. In flight this bird much resembles an Eagle, and is by far the finest flier of the ocean. Frigate-birds, Tropic-birds, and Boobies (*Sula*), I was assured, breed in great numbers on Bigar, an uninhabited and nearly barren island, the northernmost of the Ratak chain, and also on Gasparrico (S. Bartolomeo), rather more to the north-east and of a similar character. From these islands, especially the former, the natives get the feathers of *Tachypetes*, which are used for ornaments for their big canoes. As one sails along the coasts a little more ornithological life is to be observed, consisting of more or less numerous flocks of Noddies (*Anous*), mixed with Terns (*Sterna melanauchen* and *S. bergii*) and a few examples of *Gygis alba*. These species are also the only birds seen hovering over the lagoons. Sometimes the splendid light-blue water of the latter reflects in a wonderful way on the beautiful white of these birds, and it was striking for a moment, even for me, to see a delicate blue *Sterna bergii* skimming over the waves thus illuminated. The last-named species I observed first in the middle of October on the lagoons, but only single specimens or pairs. Then they were moulting, and some examples had lost nearly all their primaries; otherwise they were in the so-called winter dress, with a black crescent on the occiput. In the beginning of January they were in full nuptial dress, the whole cap being black; and at this time I also got fresh-laid eggs from this lagoon, but was not able myself to find the breeding-grounds. This would seem, on taking up the map, to be a very easy task, but is, in fact, a very difficult one, and might take several days. It must be remembered that the atoll of this island (Taluit) consists of fifty-eight different islands, which encircle a lagoon of about twenty-eight sea-miles in length and seventeen in diameter, and that it is not always easy to land just where one pleases.

The avifauna of the islands themselves is quite as poor as that of the lagoons, and, in fact, every island shows just the same kind of birds—i. e. *Strepsilas interpres*, *Charadrius fulvus*, *Actitis incana*, and *Ardea sacra*. Although the former two species winter here, they are not to be seen in large flocks, and from about ten to fourteen *Strepsilas* and about

four *Charadrius fulvus* were the highest numbers I ever observed. Specimens of both species shot in September were in moult, and still showed signs of the summer plumage; those collected at the end of October and in November wore the full winter dress. *Actitis incana* chiefly frequents the sea-shore, and rests on the isolated coral blocks, or is seen flying with great rapidity over the heavy breakers; but this bird, which is generally seen in pairs, roosts on the dead branches of trees. In habits it nearly resembles our *Actitis*, but does not flirt its tail in the same way.

At the end of October I had brought to me a specimen of *Calidris arenaria* in full winter dress, but I never observed this species myself. On the other hand, I met at the same time with a bird which seems to be *Charadrius hiaticula*, although I could not state this as certain. The specimen of *Numenius femoralis* which I mentioned in my last letter remains, to my regret, the sole one, although I offered large prices to the natives for another. The same thing occurred in regard to *Carpophaga oceanica*. This species, called a "Mule" by the natives, seems to be more plentiful on the Arno atoll (Daniel and Pedder), as there are bread-fruit trees there in considerable numbers; but all my efforts to obtain it were unsuccessful. On Arno I myself observed *Numenius femoralis*.

On the 21st of October a native brought me an example of *Eudynamis taitiensis* alive, a most wild bird, which bit and cried fearfully. As it refused all sorts of food, I had to kill it, in order to save the skin. The stomach contained wing-coverts of beetles, remains of caterpillars, and a few small seeds. In life—bill dark horn-brown, lower mandible and edging of the upper brownish grey; eye-ring obsolete greyish green; legs dirty green, claws black, soles pale yellow; iris dark brown, with a brownish-yellow outer rim. The species is called "Urit" by the natives, but none of them could tell me during what season the bird lives here. On the 26th of October I got a "very rare bird," which King Kabua, followed by his family, was bearing himself under his arm—not as a present, for these people never give any presents, even

a single feather. This bird, never seen before by the natives, was *Anas penelope*, in full winter dress ! The specimen must have been a castaway, for it was so exhausted that the king's boy had taken it by hand ; it was merely a skeleton covered by feathers.

During my visit to Arno, in the first week of November, I had the pleasure of seeing, for the first time, a large breeding-colony of Noddies. We crossed the lagoon in order to land on the opposite shore on an island called "Dagelab" by the natives, which bears an unusual vegetation. The big ganzal trees, about 80 feet high, form a small wood, and give, at a distance, the appearance of a "high island," a name which, in fact, was applied by Capt. Hudson in his map to the Arno atoll. Long before we reached the shore we saw hundreds of black birds in the air above the tops of the trees. They were *Anous melanogenys*, and another larger species, the different cry of which we noticed long before we procured the bird itself, in much smaller numbers. It proved to be *Anous stolidus*. The nests of the latter were placed in the clusters of ferns parasitic on the lower branches of *Pandanus*-trees, and I got some of the eggs through the natives. Each nest, placed on the clump of leaves, contained only one egg, some freshly laid, others in all stages of incubation up to the young bird. Notwithstanding the full breeding-season, the birds were still moulting. The nests of *Anous melanogenys* were placed in the forked branches of trees, sometimes very far from the stem, and consisting only of a few twigs ; they were in colonies ; many single ganzal trees bore more than twenty nests. I did not get the eggs, as the natives were too lazy to climb the trees, saying they were unable to do so.

The whole number of birds as yet observed and obtained by me in the Marshall group is twenty, namely :—

<i>Eudynamis taitiensis</i> .	<i>Numenius femoralis</i> .
<i>Carpophaga oceanica</i> .	<i>Ardea sacra</i> .
<i>Streptopelia interpres</i> .	<i>Sterna bergii</i> .
<i>Charadrius fulvus</i> .	— <i>melanauchen</i> .
? — <i>hiaticula</i> .	<i>Anous melanogenys</i> .
<i>Actitis incana</i> .	— <i>stolidus</i> .
<i>Calidris arenaria</i> .	<i>Gygis alba</i> .

Anas penelope.
Puffinus, sp. inc.
Procellaria, sp. inc.

Phaeton æthereus.
—— flavirostris.
Tachypetes aquilus.

So far as I know, no bird has been previously registered from the Marshall group. There are no small land-birds here, and, what strikes me as most singular, no Kingfisher, which is the more to be wondered at, as the islands abound with lizards.

XXXII.—*Descriptions of four new Species of East-African Birds.* By Captain G. E. SHELLEY.

(Plates VII. & VIII.)

1. *CISTICOLA RHODOPTERA*, sp. n.

Upper half of the head dark brown, with the lores, cheeks, and ear-coverts of a slightly more ashy shade; back brown, with a slight rufous shade on the middle, a more ashy shade towards the scapulars, and an olive shade on the rump and upper tail-coverts; wings dark brown, with all the coverts, and with broad margins to the quills, bright chestnut; the secondaries with narrow pale ends; tail-feathers (much worn) brown, with white ends, and with a broad subterminal blackish-brown bar; chin, throat, and centre of the chest white, shading into pale ochreous brown on the sides of the crop, flanks, thighs, and under tail-coverts; under surface of the wings dark brown, with the inner margins of the quills and the centre portion of the coverts pale ochreous brown, the remainder of the under wing-coverts white; bill pale brown, shading into dark brown towards the base of the upper and the edges of both mandibles; tarsi and feet flesh-colour. Total length 4·8 inches, culmen 0·6, wing 2·15, tail 2·4, tarsus 0·95.

A single specimen of this bird has been sent to me by Dr. Kirk from the Usambara hills.

The present species is closely allied to *C. erythroptera* (Jard.). Compared with a specimen of that bird obtained by myself at Accra, on the Gold Coast (labelled “♀, 15th of